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AUTHOR Ferguson, Donald G.
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ABSTRACT

A new student climate is desperately needed in our schools. Basic to a new climate is recognition that what is occurring is an appeal to be recognized, heard, and respected. Students' legitimate demands need to be responded to. This calls for a searching look at what the school's job is and the development of a positive course of action to give leadership to the new student voice. A total of three suggestions are given. First, there is a need for a better student information system for monitoring student life and incorporating student information in school decisions. Secondly, there is a need for student development emphasis within the schools. This could be achieved through: (1) student centers, (2) teacher resources, (3) student resources, (4) counselor resources, and (5) black-white relations. Lastly, there is a need for massive reform in the curriculum. Changes should include: (1) learning resource centers, (2) more and different offerings, particularly in vocational areas and work study programs, and (3) forums on contemporary issues. (KJ)

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The New Morality of Teenagers--The New Student Voice

Donald G. Ferguson
Director
Interprofessional Research Commission on
Pupil Personnel Services
and
Visiting Professor
University of Maryland

A Presentation for Discussion at the Convention of the
American Association of School Administrators

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A new student climate is desperately needed in our schools. As John Gardner recently pointed out in a televised interview, major reforms are needed in the American school system. Few doubt this; yet too many among the school administration, teaching staffs, and parents, are resisting change. On the other hand, students are demanding it and at the same time acting out their hostility toward resisting adults through protests, overt and subtle expressions of anger, or through the use of drugs. Much of their anger, although acted out toward the schools, really strikes out at all adults and all previous generations for burdening their generation, as no previous generation has been burdened, with the accumulation of problems--pollution, over-population, anihilation, inhumanity, and materialism. The school happens to be where they gather and where they, maybe hopefully, see a chance for change. In the face of this, they do not see adults providing solutions.

No community is immune to these troubles. Almost every school district has young people in it that vary from the apathetic (the copped-out student)

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to the disruptive. In between these extremes are those who are supportive, those mildly dissatisfied, those mildly involved in orderly ways to adjust grievances, those agitating for change, and even those threatening disruption. Dealing with this anger means more than not letting it get out of control; it means building a more positive climate.

Basic to a new student climate is recognition that what is occurring is an appeal, a cry to be recognized, heard, and respected. Students' legitimate demands need to be responded to as well as the vandalism. Far greater student involvement is called for. This does not mean divesting the school of its authority or powers. It calls for a searching look at what the school's job is. What is the proper role for the discipline officer, or the proper relationship between the building administrator and student? Between teachers and students? What should the counselor's role be? Where is the student advocate on the staff?

Most important is the development of a positive course of action to give leadership to the new student voice. It is one of the most vital and educationally potent resources for reform within the schools today.

Despite the fact that the majority of what one reads today has a highly negative tone, we believe that the force behind the new student voice has an essentially positive direction. There is too much within the bulletins one reads from local districts and state departments that focuses on control. Newspapers and magazine coverage as well as professional articles speak with fear and admonition. There are many positive and constructive things occurring that tend to be ignored while the dissonance and disruption are focused upon. This is not to deny that a critical situation exists or that many people need to be shocked into concern and action, for indeed both are true. Yet more of those who are writing should take responsibility

for pointing out what is good. Those who are working on solutions need support and recognition for their efforts. And, students need to have evidence that adults recognize and respond with support to what is wholesome and constructive.

Many schools have responded ahead of the crisis with prevention efforts and developmental steps. Others are ready to take action, but need help and direction and some assurance that "going with the students" will not simply cause more problems.

IMPRESSIONS GAINED FROM NATIONWIDE INTERVIEWS

Without question, the vast majority of students are anxious for solutions to the problems of student climate and, in our judgment, they represent a tremendous resource, to date largely untapped. We gained these impressions from nationwide visitations. During the past several years IRCOPPS has interviewed students, parents, teachers, administrators, and community people in approximately half the states and in all sections of contental United States. The suggestions shared in this discussion grow out of approximately 1500 hours of interviewing in school districts and state departments of education.

Students we interviewed impressed us as bright, concerned, respectful, and anxious to help. There were the others too, the disruptive and trouble-bent, but they were a minority. Students want to be in on decisions, to be given more responsibility and to show pride in their schools. Far too many though expressed helplessness and felt not really trusted by adults. Many were bothered by the rift they see in relationships between students and staff. They are aware of the student-student relations that need improving but feel that they can work out most of them if supported

by administrators and teachers. They see adults (staff and their parents) as "up-tight" and the kids "put down".

Too many young people see few channels for meaningful interaction with their teachers and administrators. They report that the adults do not view them as individuals but rather feel labeled, if recognized at all, as either "good guys" or "bad guys" with the latter held in tight control and the "good" recognized but not given enough chance to have any influence. In many instances even student government was seen as under too heavy control and manipulation of teachers.

In some troubled schools, students relate that teachers, administrators, and counselors are running things for grown-ups' convenience. They see that adults have many problems and hangups, and that while these are being worked out, youngsters are left to find satisfaction only in relationships with one another and outside the school.

We believe that conditions are going to require much more cooperation to achieve solutions. If school officials continue to try to work solutions aloof from students, the gap will widen. There are many evidences today of districts ignoring students and of concentrating a disproportionate amount of time and energy on control. This has led to open hostility or a student cop-out. Instead and optimally, there are examples of school administrators, staff, community, student body, parents and community working together toward goals of self-development and self-control. We have been impressed with the potential for good human relationships that exists. Where concern is shown, short and long range steps can be taken to improve school climate.

THE THRUST OF OUR SUGGESTIONS

Our suggestions are dependent on a recognition that students have a legitimate gripe, and that the situation is by no means hopeless although of crisis proportions in some communities. Some fundamental changes must take place, and there are resources to cope with what is going on. More school administrators are going to have to face the fact that there is a new student voice in the schools and that it must be listened to.

Commissioner of Education, James E. Allen, has said,

> "Many school administrators and parents, especially in the suburbs, hope that young peoples' problems will go away so we can return to 'the good old days'. The young don't see it that way. They are concerned about their future and the values in society. There are going to be some drastic changes. We just have to go through a difficult period until we find the answers. We have to listen to the young people and build from there. I think they will respect us more."[1]

The pressures on today's administrators are so great that one certainly wonders how they withstand them and how they can be expected to go through a more difficult period. They are getting pressure from all sides--teacher power, kid power, parent power, black power, usually too few dollars to work with and often a critical press.

In defense of school officials, we want to point out that we are aware that the new student voice is often drowned out by demands of teachers, community leaders, and of citizens' cry for economy. But we are also aware that too often the elements of human contact, receptive communication, receptive listening and rapid solutions are denied by red tape, traditional channels, and selfish interests and schedules that are too heavy. We do not like to face up to the fact that students are

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[1]"What's Wrong with the High Schools?" Newsweek, February 16, 1970, p. 69.

often right. As Colman McCarthy has stated, "Instead of seeing the content of their view, we see only their contentiousness."[2]

Any rational observer can certainly see that solutions to the crises are not going to be easily found and the price in human effort as well as dollars is not going to be cheap.

In the hope that from our observations and interviews we have gained a few ideas in the areas of reform that are applicable, we offer the following three suggestions:[3]

1. A better information system for monitoring student life and incorporating student information in school decisions
2. A student development emphasis within our schools
3. A massive reform in the curriculum

The Need for a Student Information System

Throughout the nation, school districts show great concern for running a good business operation, curriculum improvement and development, staff negotiations and staff development. We give far less consideration and show less concern for our end product, the student or educated citizen. Some very knowledgeable persons have said that most other enterprises would be out of business if they paid as little attention to their product as do the schools.

One need only review the typical board of education agenda to see that there is little in it that relates directly to student life or to the evaluation of the school's efforts in terms of what is produced. Furthermore, a review of supporting documents at board meetings or an

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[2]Youth: Alienated, Estranged--Or Just Bratlike?" Christian Century, p. 69.

[3]Suggestions in this presentation are similar to those made by the author in a study of a local school district under contract with Peat, Marwick, Mitchell & Co.

interview with board members would reveal that they have not had much input of information on students to use in arriving at their decisions. In other words, one seldom finds students on the agenda, present in person or represented by information about them. This comment is not by way of minimizing the necessity for boards to deal with money matters, teacher negotiations, redistricting, etc.; but another high priority item on the list should be student life and outcomes.

Those on school staffs must develop information systems to provide decision-makers with up-to-date, usable student information for making decisions--administrative, instructional, guidance, and research.

The school district organization should have a unit that has student development and student life as its primary concern--responsible and accountable to the board, administration, and students for programs that focus on student life and for monitoring and interpreting student outcomes.

Again if one looks at the organization of the typical school system, he finds units under the superintendent that reflect board agenda (that is, instruction, business, staff personnel, etc.) but seldom does he find a unit responsible and accountable for what is happening to youngsters. Our belief is that this must change. Granted, there are pupil services, or pupil personnel services, but these have not typically played the role of student advocate.

One major program under a student development unit would be that relating to pupil information. This is vital to decision making, and it also would show youngsters that the school is concerned about their success. Its information gathering would include a follow-up of graduates and early school leavers: What is happening and has happened to our college bound? Do they finish? How did they do? Were they well prepared? How about

those who graduated but did not go on to college? Are they in some local continuing education program, in local business or industry? How about those who did not graduate? Are they employed? Have they remained in the community? Has the school done them and the community a disservice by dumping them into the economic and social life of the community, bitter and ill prepared to contribute?

Today's students should be involved in planning such information collecting studies, in fact involved in the collection and interpretation. Not only do they represent a major man-power resource, but how better can they learn about their community and about economic, man-power, political, and human problems that exist within the community?

Up-to-date information is needed on our present student population, their interests, their values, their attitudes, as well as achievement and ability information. In addition to the typical demographic data, we need to know about factors which describe today's young people. How do they spend their time? How much money do they have to spend? How many have automobiles or access to them, etc.? What are their career aspirations and perceptions? How do they view work? What are their tastes in art and music? How do they manifest independence? How do they resolve conflict?

This information would be helpful, not only to the board and other central office decision makers, but also to building level administrators, to teachers, and to youngsters themselves. Youngsters have a very limited amount of information on which to compare themselves with others. They could be helped to understand themselves and the student body of which they are a part if such information were made available. Also, with information about graduates and early school leavers, their own plans and the career decisions could be more intelligently dealt with.

A Student Development Focus to Build Better Human Relations

There is a clear need to improve student-student and student-staff relationships as well as better relationships between the schools and the communities they serve. The resources are available if people are imaginative, do not demand miracles, and are patient and willing to work on their own attitudes. The belief underlying these remarks is that there is a willingness as well as a general desire on the part of teachers, administrators, parents, counselors, and students to get to work at it. Student development is, of course, a shared responsibility among many people in the schools and certainly with the parents.

Student Centers. Student development units suggested earlier to be part of the central administration should be reflected in each building. The present situation pointed out earlier regarding the absence of a student focused unit within central offices is also reflected in our high schools. That is, throughout our schools it is easy for one to find the management center (principal's office and the school office), the centers for instruction (classrooms), teacher centers (lounges and occasionally private offices), and even curriculum centers; but it is difficult to find a student center. One might claim this observation is in error for classrooms are student centers and that all that exists in the school is for the students. Our observations did not support this. Indeed, most classrooms tend to be teacher-centered with a heavier emphasis on management and other teacher concerns than upon students.

We recommend a student development center for each school and suggest that it be located away from the administrators' offices. It should emphasize student interests and student life and reflect their values and

concerns. The Center should be the locale for student government, activities and clubs, community projects, publications, planning student assemblies and forums, etc.

The Center could provide many of the present guidance functions with an emphasis on students, not on the management aspects of guidance (scheduling, filling out college forms, etc.). Although counselors' offices might be located in the Center or adjacent to it, it is hoped that counselor-student interaction would occur throughout the building and not always in the counselor's office.

Under adult supervision, students should have considerable authority and responsibility for planning, coordinating, and providing Center activities. The Center should reflect today's young people--their concerns and interests. Even the decor should be young in taste and expression.

Teacher Resources. Teaching staffs in most schools we visited had a core of teachers (especially, although not exclusively, the younger) who had healthy rapport with students. Their talents should be recognized and used. A considerable number of teachers should have time in their schedules for working with student groups. They should be available to meet with individual students and small groups in a counseling type relationship. These teachers should be backed up by counselors who are especially trained and who have reasonable counseling schedules, but the natural relationship between a student and teacher he likes and respects should be encouraged and used in planning. Time must be designated for this; otherwise these teachers will continue to appear to the students as nice, willing people who are too busy to be of much help. Indeed, it must be recognized that if good relationships are desired, provision must be made for teachers to

be available to interact with students. Teacher recruitment and in-service education should reflect the desired "new look" in teacher-student relationships.

Student Resources. Relationships could be substantially enhanced through more active participation by students on a variety of curriculum, student development, and administration councils and project committees. In our judgment, much more involvement is desirable than exists today in most schools. This by no means implies "turning things over to students". On the contrary, it means making them more responsible for what goes on in their school. Students throughout the school need to see their representatives in on some of the decisions that affect student life. They need to be able to hold them accountable too, not as is presently the case--the adults are blamed for nearly all of the problems since they seem to be totally in control of all that goes on.

The typical student body is capable of taking much more leadership and responsibility than at present. Granted, we interviewed only a small percentage of the nation's school population, but believe them to be representative. We found many students mature for their age, insightful in understanding the needs of their schools, and anxious to step in and help. They need supervision, of course, but by imaginative adults who can "keep their cool", ones who see the "new student voice" as essentially healthful and educationally constructive, not as a threat. Staff supervision should emphasize student involvement as part of the learning experience for citizenship.

Examples of this are the students who are active in school volunteer programs for all kinds of tutoring, individual work with emotionally

disturbed children in guidance orientation programs, in college counseling programs, etc. They can be a great manpower and motivating source.

Counselors as a Resource. Counselors (in fact, all of the pupil service workers) should be far more student-focused. During our visits we met some who are carrying out a student advocacy role in their schools. Why aren't all of them doing so? There are numerous reasons of course. Some are not trained or prepared for the counseling responsibility; they are only given the title. Others, even some of those prepared, are tied up by unimaginative principals and by the demands of an overburdened teaching faculty so that their roles are those of assistant administrators or record and scheduling clerks. Then too there were those who see counseling as an administrative internship. Sometimes they are just the wrong people trying to do the job. The counseling function should be seen as a major component of any student development system. Where we did see this, the pay-off was clear in terms of student-student and student-faculty relationships. Students commented on the value in having someone available to listen to their concerns. We believed where this occurred that teachers too showed more interest in student welfare.

Black-White Relations. We found evidence in many school districts of need for a closer understanding between the schools and members of the black and other minority groups. Relationships between black and white students, for example, have been involved in many recent student difficulties but is not the problem in and of itself. Our schools have not given appropriate attention to the educational, economic, political, and social needs of our black citizens and to other minority groups.

An attempt should be made to have more representatives of minority groups on school staffs. More attention should be given to text and other material that presents and represents the best of black people. Teachers and counselors should help black children aspire to higher levels of achievement and career development and in setting higher goals. Many of them should be going on to college. There should be many more ways in which black children could have access to distinction (in addition to the athletic program). More vocational education opportunities need to be provided. Schools should provide thorough case studies of black children who are troubled learners early in their school life emphasizing their strengths, not their handicaps.

All school staff should be provided ways to become better acquainted with minority group children and with the neighborhoods in which they live so that the school's potential and proper influence on the lives of these children could be better understood.

More effort should be made to get more blacks involved in the schools. Black community leaders should be encouraged to take a clear advocacy role on behalf of their people, particularly the children.

Communication and interaction must be fostered among black and white students and adults from the schools, the administration and the faculty. Interaction results in understanding. We interviewed many who were interested in working toward better conditions.

Massive Reform in Curriculum

There is a causal relationship between student conduct problems and the curriculum. Much of the program is more like yesterday than today. There is need to update content and methodology and to increase the variety

of offerings. Learning resource centers, greater use of new technology, and a high level of student participation could make the curriculum more stimulating to students.

A greater variety of offerings, particularly in vocational areas and work study or cooperative (work-school) programs, would do much to increase the level of interest among students. Student motivation would be increased which should relieve some of the pressure on the faculty for control and management and lessen their preoccupation with discipline.

There would be merit in providing forums on contemporary issues supervised by teachers who are interested in that kind of learning experience. Again teacher-time to plan these is vital. Teachers should work closely with students in planning, executing, and evaluating the outcomes of these. We have seen forums in operation and are impressed that they are one way to stimulate thinking and positive actions by students. Through them, teachers and students develop a healthy respect for one another, and young people grow in responsibility and citizenship. The forums need to be open in content, relaxed in tone, and student-centered. Teachers need to be ones who have tolerance and skill in listening and the capacity to be pulled into and submerged in the conversation. They should avoid the didactic approach and minimize the control and evaluation role which characterizes the "typical" classroom presentation. They need skill, and often training, in discussion techniques.

These forums should allow for the expression of many and diverse points of view. Non-school people should be encouraged to participate as the topics warrant and as students request. School officials and representatives of community agencies, groups, and institutions have much to offer. There are many graduates of local high schools attending local or

regional universities who could be used as valuable resource people. Young people and adults who have graduated from local high schools and entered the local labor market could be used to enrich the forums and at the same time contribute to better relationships between the schools and the community. In general, schools need to be more relevant to the community, more flexible in their scheduling, and more human in the way the individual student is handled in the educational process.

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